IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A computer-implemented method, comprising:

   associating, by a first processor, one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an individual feedback rating associated with each user, the individual feedback rating associated with each user being established based on votes from other users of the plurality of users of the online trading community;

   deriving, by a second processor, a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by summing an individual feedback rating associated with the particular user, [[and]] one or more individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the particular user to the online trading community, and one or more individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the one or more users referred by the particular user to the online trading community; and

   storing the community rating uniquely corresponding to the particular user in a storage device.

2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the online trading community comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying or selling of goods or services.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein the network comprises the Internet.

4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more characteristic values comprise a feedback value based on feedback concerning the particular user received from other users of the plurality of users in the electronic community.

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 4, wherein the other users of the plurality of
   users comprise users that have previously traded with the particular user.

6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising maintaining a relationship
   tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree includes sponsorship
   relationships between the particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were
   referred by the particular user.

7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein the sponsorship relationships of the
   plurality of users are represented as the relationship tree including one or more n-ary
   trees.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein information concerning the
   sponsorship relationships between the plurality of users is stored in a data structure for
   each user of the plurality of users.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 8, wherein the data structure for the particular
   user contains a pointer to at least one user of the plurality of users that was referred by the
   particular user.

10. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the deriving of the community
    rating for the particular user is performed utilizing a recursive routine.

11-13. (Canceled)

14. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing
    sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:
    associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an
        online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an

individual feedback rating associated with each user, the individual feedback

rating associated with each user being established based on votes from other users

of the plurality of users of the online trading community; and

derive a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by summing an

individual feedback rating associated with the particular user, [[and]] one or more

individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the

particular user to the online trading community, and one or more individual

feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the one or more

users referred by the particular user to the online trading community.

15. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the online

trading community comprises an electronic community buying and selling of

merchandise over a network, the merchandise having at least one of goods and services.

16. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the one or more

characteristic values comprise a feedback value based on feedback concerning the

particular user received from other users of the plurality of users in the electronic

community.

17. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the sets of

instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain

a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree

includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any user of the

plurality of users that were referred by the particular user.

18.-20. (Canceled)

21. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the community rating for the

particular user represent a reputation value corresponding to the particular user.

22. (Currently Amended) A computer-implemented method, comprising:

    associating, by a first processor, a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality
        of users within an online trading community, the first characteristic value being
        obtained for the first user utilizing a first feedback value based on feedback
        received concerning the first user from other users of the plurality of users;

    associating, by a second processor, a second characteristic value with a second user of the
        plurality of users, wherein the second user is referred to the online trading
        community by the first user, the second characteristic value being obtained for the
        second user utilizing a second feedback value based on feedback received
        concerning the second user from other users of the plurality of users;

    associating a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users, wherein
        the third user is referred to the online trading community by the second user, the
        third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by utilizing a third feedback
        value based on feedback received concerning the third user from other users of
        the plurality of users;

    deriving, by a third processor, a first community rating for the first user by utilizing a
        sum of the first feedback value, [[and]] the second feedback value, and the third
        feedback value; and

    storing the first community rating for the first user in a storage device.

23. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 22, further comprising:

    associating a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users, wherein
        the third user is referred to the online trading community by the second user, the
        third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by utilizing a third feedback
        value based on feedback received concerning the third user from other users of
        the plurality of users; and

    deriving a second community rating for the second user by utilizing an aggregation of the
        second characteristic value and the third characteristic value.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, further comprising maintaining a
    relationship tree between the first user and the second user of the plurality of users,
    wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the second user
    as a lineal descendent of the first user.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further comprising maintaining a
    relationship tree between the second user and the third user of the plurality of users,
    wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the third user as
    a lineal descendant of the second user.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24, wherein the relationship tree comprises a
    nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users referred by at least one of
    the first user and the second user.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein the first community rating
    comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the second
    community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second user.

28. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing
sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

      associate a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users within an
            online trading community, the first characteristic value is obtained for the first
            user by utilizing a first feedback value based on feedback received concerning the
            first user from other users of the plurality of users;

      associate a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of users,
            wherein the second user is referred to the online trading community by the first
            user, the second characteristic value is obtained for the second user by utilizing a
            second feedback value based on feedback received concerning the second user
            from other users of the plurality of users;

      <u>associating a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users, wherein</u>
            <u>the third user is referred to the online trading community by the second user, the</u>
            <u>third characteristic value is obtained for the third user by utilizing a third feedback</u>
            <u>value based on feedback received concerning the third user from other users of</u>
            <u>the plurality of users;</u> and

      deriving a first community rating for the first user by utilizing a sum of the first feedback
            value<u>,</u> [[and]] the second feedback value<u>, and the third feedback value</u>.

29. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the sets of
      instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain
      a relationship tree between the first user and the second user of the plurality of users,
      wherein the relationship tree comprises a referral relationship having the second user as a
      lineal descendent of the first user and the second user is referred to the online trading
      community by the first user.

30. (Canceled)

31. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the relationship
    tree comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users referred by
    at least one of the first user and the second user.

32. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the first
    community rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the
    second community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second
    user.

33. (Currently Amended) A system, comprising:
    a first storage medium; and
    a first computer coupled with the first storage medium, the first computer to associate one
        or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an online
        trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an
        individual feedback rating associated with each user and established based on
        votes from other users of the plurality of users of the online trading community,
        and to derive a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by
        summing an individual feedback rating associated with the particular user, [[and]]
        one or more individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users
        referred by the particular user to the online trading community, and one or more
        individual feedback ratings associated with one or more users referred by the one
        or more users referred by the particular user to the online trading community.

34. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, further comprising:
    a second storage medium; and
    a second computer coupled with the second storage medium and the first computer via a
        network interface, the second computer to receive feedback concerning the
        particular user from other users of the plurality of users, generate a feedback value
        corresponding to the particular user based on the feedback, and transmit the
        feedback value to the first computer.

35. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the first computer comprises a
    server computer and the second computer comprises a client computer.

36. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is further to
    maintain a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship
    tree includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the
    plurality of users that were referred by the particular user.

37. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is further to
    determine the one or more characteristic values based on the feedback value
    corresponding to the particular user.

38. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the second computer is accessed by
    the plurality of users to trade merchandise, wherein the trading of the merchandise
    comprises buying or selling of goods or services.

39. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 34, wherein the network interface is to couple
    the first computer with the second computer over a network having the Internet.

40. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the sets of
    instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to:
    associate a third characteristic value with a third user of the plurality of users, wherein the
        third user is referred to the online trading community by the second user, the third
        characteristic value is obtained for the third user by utilizing a third feedback
        value based on feedback received concerning the third user from other users of
        the plurality of users; and
    derive a second community rating for the second user by utilizing an aggregation of the
        second characteristic value and the third characteristic value.

41. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 40, wherein the sets of

    instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain

    a relationship tree between the second user and the third user of the plurality of users,

    wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the third user as

    a lineal descendent of the second user.

42. (Currently Amended) A computer-implemented method, comprising:

    associating, by a first processor, one or more characteristic values with each user of a

        plurality of users of an online trading community, the one or more characteristic

        values representing an individual feedback rating associated with each user, the

        individual feedback rating associated with each user being established based on

        votes from other users of the plurality of users of the online trading community;

    determining, by a second processor, a community rating uniquely corresponding to a

        particular user by summing ~~one or more of~~ the following: (1) an individual

        feedback rating associated with the particular user, (2) an individual feedback

        rating associated with each user of the plurality of users referred to the online

        trading community by the particular user, (3) an individual feedback rating

        associated with each user referred to the online trading community by each

        referred user of the particular user, and (4) a number of users referred to the

        online community by the particular user; and

    storing the community rating uniquely corresponding to the particular user in a storage

        device.

43. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, further comprising associating the

    community rating to the particular user.

44. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, wherein the online trading community

    comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a network, wherein the

    trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying or selling of goods or

    services.

45. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, further comprising maintaining a
      relationship tree between the particular user, each user referred to the online trading
      community by the particular user, and each user referred to the online trading community
      by each referred user of the particular user.

46. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, wherein the determining of the community
      rating for the particular user is performed utilizing a recursive routine.

47. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 42, wherein the one or more characteristic
      values and the community rating comprise ~~one or more of the following: alphabetic
      values,~~ numeric values~~, alpha-numeric values, symbolic values, and graphic values~~.

48. (Currently Amended) A system, comprising:
      a first storage medium; and
      a first computer coupled with the first storage medium, the first computer to associating
            one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an
            online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an
            individual feedback rating associated with each user, the individual feedback
            rating associated with each user being established based on votes from other users
            of the plurality of users of the online trading community; and
      determining a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by summing
            ~~one or more of~~ the following: (1) an individual feedback rating associated with
            the particular user, (2) an individual feedback rating associated with each user of
            the plurality of users referred to the online trading community by the particular
            user, (3) an individual feedback rating associated with each user referred to the
            online trading community by each referred user of the particular user, and (4) a
            number of users referred to the online community by the particular user.

49. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 48, further comprising:

    a second storage medium; and

    a second computer coupled with the second storage medium and the first computer via a
        network interface, the second computer to receive feedback concerning the
        particular user from other users of the plurality of users, generate a feedback value
        corresponding to the particular user based on the feedback, and transmit the
        feedback value to the first computer.

50. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 49, wherein the first computer comprises a
    server computer and the second computer comprises a client computer.

51. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 48, wherein the first computer is further to
    associate the community rating to the particular user; and

    maintain a relationship tree between the particular user, each user referred to the online
        trading community by the particular user, and each user referred to the online
        trading community by each referred user of the particular user.

52. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 48, wherein the first computer is further to
    perform a recursive routine when determining the community rating for the particular
    user.

53. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 48, wherein the one or more characteristic values
    and the community rating comprise ~~one or more of the following: alphabetic values,~~
    numeric values~~, alpha-numeric values, symbolic values, and graphic values~~.

54. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 49, wherein the second computer is accessed by
    the plurality of users to trade merchandise, wherein the trading of the merchandise
    comprises buying or selling of goods or services.

55. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing

sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users of an

online trading community, the one or more characteristic values representing an

individual feedback rating associated with each user, the individual feedback

rating associated with each user being established based on votes from other users

of the plurality of users of the online trading community; and

determine a community rating uniquely corresponding to a particular user by summing

~~one or more of~~ the following: (1) an individual feedback rating associated with

the particular user, (2) an individual feedback rating associated with each user of

the plurality of users referred to the online trading community by the particular

user, (3) an individual feedback rating associated with each user referred to the

online trading community by each referred user of the particular user, and (4) a

number of users referred to the online community by the particular user.

56. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the sets of

instruction which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to associate

the community rating to the particular user.

57. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the online

trading community comprises an electronic community to trade merchandise over a

network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises at least one of buying or

selling of goods or services.

58. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the sets of

instruction which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain

a relationship tree between the particular user, each user referred to the online trading

community by the particular user, and each user referred to the online trading community

by each referred user of the particular user.

59. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 55, wherein the sets of
    instruction which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to perform a
    recursive routing when determining of the community rating for the particular user.